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ABSTRACT

In this paper the elusive, integrative and common elements that unify the large and diverse field of early childhood education are sought. Present diversity among educators of young children is viewed against the historical background of variety in the implementation of kindergartens and nursery schools in the United States. The effects of federal legislation in increasing the varied purposes of early childhood programs are discussed. It is determined that kinds of services, clients served, program purposes and underlying educational ideas do not provide a unifying theme for the field of early childhood education. In conclusion, three claims are made: 1) that individual practitioners become familiar with a small area of the field and recognize that their insight contributes to the field as a whole; 2) that future developments will indicate which elements of the present diversity are most beneficial; and 3) that the field is unified because early childhood educators as a group hold and use a common belief system with shared values, definitions, concepts and slogans. (RH)

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Early Childhood Education: A Synoptic View

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As I was about to prepare this paper I chanced to be reading Theodore H. White's In Search of History: A Personal Adventure. (1978) White, who is probably best known for the books he has written about American presidential election campaigns ("The Making of a President" series), had written an autobiography laced with personal recollections of famous men. The most interesting parts of the book are about his personal beginnings. White grew up in the slums of Boston and he shares his perceptions of that time, of the culture around him, and of his own roots in transitional American-Jewish culture. A few paragraphs attracted me. I should like to share them with you:

"The old religion was...as much history as ritual. There are almost as many different sects of Jews, who quarrel with each other, in both the new and old forms of our religion, as there are among Protestants. But if a thread ties them all together, it is the thread of the Shma - the incantation "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." The cantillation of this phrase was set long before the Crusades and the persecutions that scorched the Crusaders' trail; but its intonation shrieks with the agony of medieval Europe, where Jews were burned at the stake for their faith. We learned in Hebrew school that those Jews wailed the Shma even as the flames licked up at them; and we children argued, on our way home at night, whether it was sensible to give up your life rather than kiss a cross. Most of us admitted to cowardice; but we stood in awe of the countless forefathers who had chosen to burn rather than change their faith, and the Shma was the call of their courage.

The idea behind the Shma is the unity of all happenings; it was an idea of prehistoric shepherds who put out, in a world of idols, superstitions and numerous gods of random passions and contrary impulses, the new idea that there was but one God, who gave order to the entire universe. The mind set of all great Jewish thinkers since those shepherds has been to bind the variability of observed phenomena into one all-embracing theory. I do not believe in inherited racial characteristics beyond the obvious physical ones; but inherited cultural characteristics seem to me to be irrepressible. Thus, over the centuries, those Jewish thinkers who have moved out and been accepted in the larger world stage have been bearers of some one seductive all-embracing theory which is as unifying as the Shma. At its spectacular best, this mind set yields Einstein's unified-field theory, stretching from microcosm to macrocosm, binding energy to matter by irrefutable laws, substituting $E=mc^2$ for the Shma. At its most humanly compelling, the mind set produces a Christ,

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> who replaces the tribal vengeance of the Old Testament with a theory of mercy and universal brotherhood that embraces every tongue, sex, skin color, and strange custom. Whether it is the all-embracing economic and dialectic theory of Marx, or the patterning of sex, ego and the repressions of modern man as in Freud's world, the passion of Jewish thinkers for a single, universal theory in every field of knowledge or behavior has been persistent, creative - and frequently subversive to settled establishments and order throughout Western history." (pp. 25-26)

White's view of the importance of the Shma in Jewish tradition is well documented. His view of the importance of similar synoptic, integrative theories is also well documented. Comprehensive theories have impacted on many fields and have moved thought and research along within them. Proposing new integrative theories often results in what Kuhn (1970) has called "scientific revolutions," since new theories help scientists view the world in ways that were not possible before. Such theories also provide a unity to a field of inquiry or of human endeavor. But whether the development of such integrative theories is the sole cultural baggage or inherited cultural characteristic of a single ethnic group is open to question.

The idea of searching for the integrative statements that hold a field such as early childhood education together intrigued me. I wanted to see if I could tease out of the traditions and practices of early childhood education those elements that have served an integrative function.

My motivation, in part, stemmed from the fact that, for two years prior to October 1, 1978, I served as president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. This is an organization of over 32,000 members, mostly in the United States. Its stated purpose is to "serve and act on behalf of the needs and rights of young children, with primary focus on the provision of educational services and resources."

During the past several years, the association and, I believe, the field has been more concerned with diversity than with unity. Our membership was geographically diverse. It was ethnically diverse, representing minorities as well as the American ethnic majority. It was educationally diverse, including in its membership persons from various professional, educational and technical backgrounds, with various degrees and kinds of education, and with various responsibilities relating to children. The composition of the membership of the association was varied and comprehensive, but was it unified? Was there one idea or ideal, one need or purpose, one set of beliefs or assumptions, one set of perceptions that was held in common by all?

It might even be questioned as to whether the membership as a whole was committed to early childhood education. A number of affiliates had opted over the years to delete the word "education" from their title so that they became the "_____ Association for Young Children," titles that might better reflect advocacy than service. I found that while there were continued pressures for the association to take stands, especially in relation to policy issues, unless the stand was a broad, nonspecific one, it was difficult to gain the consensus of the membership.

From where would the unity of such a field as ours stem? My first thought was that the one thing that brings us all together is that we are all concerned with young children. Thus there might be something unique in the way that we serve. Yet within the age range of three through eight, and even moreso as we have extended early childhood education downward to birth, there is a vast difference. The way one serves two-year-olds is vastly different from the way one serves seven-year-olds, for example.

I came across a doctoral dissertation, by Grace Langdon, published in 1933: A Study of Similarities and Differences in Teaching in Nursery School, Kindergarten and First Grade. Of the thirty-one conclusions arrived at by observation and analysis, thirty identified differences among teaching the three grades. Only one set of conclusions dealt with similarities of teaching:

> "17. On each of the three age levels there is an emphasis on learning the rules, regulations, and customs of the group and conformity to them, and these acts are considered important for each of the three levels." (p. 274)

I believe that the similarities and differences found by Langdon over forty-five years ago would be observed by a researcher making a similar study today. Within early childhood education there are vast differences between what we do to children and what we expect of them, simply as a function of age.

If we cannot find unity in the nature of the children we serve, or the ways in which we behave towards these children, perhaps then we can find an integrative theme in the kind of service provided. The institutions we define within the field of early childhood education include nursery schools, kindergartens, primary grades of elementary school and day care centers.

The primary grades are conceived of as providing academic instruction. Although, as originally defined, these classes were limited to teaching the "three r's," by the turn of this century their focus had widened to include art and music as well as science or nature study in their curriculum. While the broadening of the curriculum can be attributed to many causes, a number of educators have felt that at least one important cause was the inclusion of kindergartens into the public schools and their resulting influence on these schools. (Vandewalker, 1907). Nevertheless, the kindergarten and primary grades have always been distinct from one another and continue to be.

The kindergarten itself was designed as an educational institution, although Froebel's concept of early education was different from the concept we hold today. Froebel viewed education as a supporter of development and as resulting from self-activity. Froebel's education was designed to help the child grasp universal concepts related to man, God and nature through the use of materials and activities that symbolized those universals. (Lilley, 1967)

Many of the early American kindergartens were sponsored by private schools, in some cases German-language schools developed to serve the German-American population. The kindergarten movement spread throughout the American community, with many private English-speaking kindergartens becoming established and public schools slowly adopting kindergartens as well.

But kindergartens were soon used to serve other than their basic educational purposes. The church considered the kindergarten as a

valuable means for carrying on its work. A number of churches incorporated kindergartens into their parish work. In addition, church missionaries used kindergartens to reach socially isolated minority groups in America, as well as foreign groups abroad. Kindergartens were established by American missionaries in cities in Brazil, Rhodesia, China, Japan and Turkey, to name but a few countries. Miss Annie L. Howe, who was sent to establish a mission kindergarten in Kobe, Japan, is credited with providing the first translations of Froebel's works in Japanese. (Vandewalker, 1908)

Kindergartens were sponsored by the Women's Christian Temperence Union to provide aid to families in locations "where the drink habit had worked its greatest havoc." Kindergartens were also incorporated into many of the early settlement houses, institutions established to provide aid, comfort and social services to poor and immigrant families in the slums of many American cities. Labor unions and business also sponsored some of the early American kindergartens.

While the variety of sponsors probably aided the development of kindergartens in America, there were disadvantages to this variety. One was the confusion in the minds of many between the idea of the kindergarten, an educational institution, and the creche or day nursery which served a child caring function. Another was the lowering of standards of quality, since many kindergarten sponsors stretched their resources to serve as many children as possible and to provide that service as a labor of love. Training was often inadequate for those serving in kindergartens as were the physical and monetary resources available. (Vandewalker, 1980)

In addition, the nature of kindergarten practice became diversified, with practice reflecting the purposes of the sponsors. Thus, church related kindergartens were more concerned with teaching children religious precepts, while settlement house kindergartens were more concerned with meeting broad social needs. The confusion between education and philanthropy was evident.

Almost a quarter of a century after Vandewalker described the proliferation of sponsors and services related to kindergartens, the contributors to the 28th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education Yearbook, Preschool and Parental Education (1929), identified an even broader array of purposes for nursery schools, then a quite new educational insititution in America. These included:

Philanthropy - The Ruggles Street Nursery School was established in Boston in 1922 along the lines of the nursery school envisioned by Margaret McMillan in England, serving the needs of poor children.

Research in Educational Curriculum and Methods - Nursery schools at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the Bureau of Educational Experiments (later to become Bank Street College) were designed "to study the growth needs of children in order to determine educational programs, procedures and materials." (p. 28)

Home Economics - Laboratory nursery schools were opened at the Merril-Palmer School of Homemaking in Detroit, Iowa State College, Cornell University, and at other institutions to educate young (i.e., college age) girls in the care and training of children. Nursery schools were also established in private womens liberal arts colleges, such as Vassar and Smith, as a result of pressure to offer a curriculum for the woman who would become a homemaker and parent.

Cooperation of Parents - One of the first nursery schools in the United States was established by a group of faculty wives at the University of Chicago "to offer an opportunity for wholesome play for their children, to give mothers certain hours of leisure from child care, and to try the social venture of cooperation of mothers in child care" (p. 29). (Ilse Forest reports on this venture as follows, "They felt the need...[in the children]...of the beginnings of social contacts, group play, the chance to give and take and the supervision at times of adults not the children's own mothers. The mothers needed, too, a knowledge of children other than their own, and an opportunity to test the efficacy of home training when their children joined a group.") (Althea Bass, quoted by Forest, pp. 299-300) Cooperative nursery schools were also reported at Smith College, and in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Research in Child Development - The Iowa Child Welfare Research Station established a nursery school for the "maintenance of a constant group [of children] which could be observed daily under favorable conditions for a period of several years." (p. 32) Other institutions established nursery schools to support a wide range of investigations of childhood needs and characteristics.

Teacher Training - Nursery schools were established to provide practice facilities for those wishing to become nursery teachers, as well as to give those studying to become primary and kindergarten teachers an opportunity to observe and work with younger children.

Supplements to Child Guidance Clinics - The North Bennett Industrial school in Boston established a Play School for Habit Training in 1922. In 1926 the Guidance Nursery School was opened in connection with the Yale Psycho-Educational Clinic. Children with specific behavioral problems were admitted to these nursery schools, including those with "records of temper tantrums, enuresis, habitual grouchiness or just bad adjustment." (p. 33)

The 1929 Yearbook dealt with day nurseries, as they called day care centers, separately. The day nursery had one primary purpose "the day care of children who remain part of a family unit but who, for social or economic reasons, cannot receive ordinary parental care." (p. 87) Centers were categorized by their sponsorship: philanthropic, commercial, industrial, and public school. The philanthropic day nursery was the most prevalent kind at the time. The authors of the yearbook took care to distinguish between the nursery school and the day nursery, with the day nursery viewed as serving a relief function, providing aid to families rather than being primarily concerned with the needs of children. It was, however, felt that the day nursery program could be strengthened by incorporating within it a nursery school program.

This distinction is also found in Ethel Beer's book, The Day Nursery (1938), first published about a decade later. Beer suggests that a differentiation should be made between the staffs of these institutions. The nursery school teacher was viewed as inadequate in background and training to properly envisage the total needs of the day nursery program.

During the forty years that have passed since the publication of the 28th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, nursery schools and day care centers have served a range of purposes

(and two other yearbooks on early childhood education have been issued). As a result of the depression of the 1930's, many local taxing agencies in the United states found themselves lacking in funds. Included in these were local school systems which, reduced the number of teachers in their employ to lower expenses. The federal government provided support for the establishment of nursery schools as one way of providing work relief for these unemployed teachers.

World War II followed the depression. In order to increase the number of women in war work, and thus extend the labor force, the federal government provided support for the establishment of day care centers in communities impacted with war-related industries. This was not a new use of day care for children, for the 1929 N.S.S.E. Yearbook states:

> It is significant that they [day nurseries] were at first, like so many other forms of child welfare, a by-product of war. It was in Philadelphia in 1863 that the first permanent day nursery was established to care for the children of women needed to manufacture soldiers' clothing and to clean in hospitals. Men were at war; industries needed workers; women were urged or forced to become breadwinners; children were neglected. The last two factors have continued to be the important elements in all-day nursery expansion. (p. 91)

While day nurseries were reported as established ten years prior to this time in New York, nevertheless it is interesting that for over a century the need for national defense has overridden the concern for family integrity in arguments about the provision of day care for young children.

The next major impact of federal legislation on early childhood education saw early childhood education serve yet another purpose. The Head Start program was established in the United States under the Economic Opportunity Act. This program conceived of as a comprehensive child development program, was established as part of the community action program, a tool in the War on Poverty fought to create the "New Society."

Most recently we have seen major changes in the sponsorship and purpose of day care centers in our country. More day care centers are being operated as commercial ventures, a major change from the situation of 1929 when the majority were philanthropic. In addition, day care is seldom considered as "relief" today. With the increase in the number of women in the work force in our country, and with the changing status of women, day care viewed is as a legitimate alternative to home care. Thus, day care has come to serve the purpose of providing a child rearing service comparable to that provided in the home nurseries of wealthy families of an earlier era.

Do the varied purposes served by different early childhood programs effect these programs in such ways as to separate them into different fields or different segments of a single, though diverse, field? After all, one can argue, all these programs deal with young children who have the same basic needs. One can also argue that, although there are different purposes served by these many programs, each program has within it a kernel of educational service. It is in what is provided over and above that service that the programs differ.

Yet all of us who have worked in schools or agencies that serve children directly know that the resources of these agencies are far from

limitless. Decisions need to be made about how to use the resources that are available. Decisions also need to be made as to the number of persons to be employed and the level and kind of competency these persons should have. It is in this decision-making process that purpose determines priorities. It is in these decisions that basic values become manifest. When education is less important than child care or community service, the agency will be less concerned with the educational background or teaching competence of those who work with children and more concerned with other attributes. It is not that one set of criteria or one set of purposes are better than others, but a particular set of purposes will ultimately lead to a different kind of service being offered to young children.

If the unity and integrity of the field is not found the nature of the children who are served by the field, and if the unity and integrity of the field is not found in the kinds of services provided, or the kinds of agencies and sponsorship of service, then where might we find it? Perhaps the nature of the ideas underlying the field, the theory and philosophy of early childhood education, is the appropriate source of unity.

Unity was one of the key ideas underlying early childhood education from its inception. Central to the idea of early education as conceived by the early kindergarteners was the conception of man as Gliedganzes, a word coined by Freidrich Froebel himself. "The word Gliedganzes means a member of a whole who is potentially commensurate with the whole to which as member he belongs, but who can make this potentiality actual only in and through active membership." (Blow, 1913, p. 9)

The concept of Gliedganzes contains three distinct implications. The first is "that which is generic or the reproducers of the species in lower forms of life, becomes Ego in man. The second implication is that this generic Ego or universal self is not only the ideal Human, but the divine...The third and final implication is that this immanent-transcedent God is one with the absolute first principal through which is given its being." (Blow, 1913, p. 10)

Froebel developed a kindergarten theory that unified man, God and nature. This theory was presented to young children through a series of symbolic materials and activities. The method of learning was through self-activity. Each child constructed his conception of unity as a result of his own active involvement in the kindergarten.

During the era of the Froebelian kindergarten, it could truly be said that one set of ideas and ideals undergirded all of the programs for young children. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, new philosophies of education, new ideas and understandings regarding children, their ways of learning and their ways of developing were to provide alternative ways of thinking about the education of young children that led to modification and revision of kindergarten theory.

In the United States, influenced by the progressive education movement and the child study movement, a reform was proposed by forward thinking kindergarteners. While they suggested that they only wished to provide alternative practices to bring kindergarten activity more in line with Froebelian philosophy, in effect they were proposing an alternative philosophy. While the method of self-activity remained an integral part of the new kindergarten program, the key element around

which programs were to be built was not the unity of man, God and nature, but rather the social life of the community and the social experience of the child. (Hill, 1913)

New ideas about the education of young children were being developed in Europe at this time that were to be major influences in early childhood education. Maria Montessori abstracted knowledge of children from the developing field of anthropology, and knowledge of programming from a fledging field of special education, to create the Montessori method. While this method has remained isolated from the mainstream of early childhood educational thought, it has had profound influences on the nature of programming and on the development of physical supports for early childhood education, especially in the design of materials and equipment.

In England, the nursery school was evolving, designed as a social service for needy children. Its developers made use of the ideas of Froebel and Montessori in the creation of this new institution. They also made use of the new insights about children being generated from the field of child study. Even psychoanalytic theory is called upon as a source of knowledge about children in this early era of thinking about programs for young children.

From the earliest period of its development, the nursery school was closely linked with the child development movement in the United States. Many of the leaders in the field of early childhood education consider themselves developmental specialists. Many of the presidents of The National Association for Nursery Education, and later of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, for example, can be identified as developmentalists rather than educationists.

During this time, however, nursery school practice and early childhood educational practice were not derived from developmental theory. No single comprehensive theory of child development existed with which all early childhood practitioners identified. Rather, a number of theoretical positions impacted on the field, including maturationism, psychoanalytic theory, Gestaltism, and others. From no one of these theories, by the way, could educational practice in nursery schools and kindergartens be extracted, although each could be used to justify some practice.

The range of theoretical positions in child development that were used to justify early childhood practice proliferated in the 1960's. Following the call for more powerful programs of preschool education, to serve as compensation for children being reared in poverty, and to improve the chances of these children's success in formal school, a wide range of early childhood program models developed. Many of these models justified their practices by recourse to developmental or learning theories, as earlier program models had. But the newer models used theoretical positions that were different from those advocated by earlier early childhood practitioners, including constructivism, behaviorism and a range of eclecticisms.

The language of early childhood education during this time has been only indirectly related to the language of child development. Early childhood education is based upon such concepts as 'individuality', freedom', 'child interest', 'need', 'play', 'activity', 'creativity', 'child-centered programs', and 'growth'. The idea of 'Development as the aim of Education' (Kohlberg and Mayer, 1972), a basic progressive education

concept is what connects education with development, and it is with the growth metaphor that the educationist and developmentalist have found a common ground in our field.

But each of the concepts identified just now is ill-defined. We find the term "play", for example, defined and used in several dozen ways in the literature. The practitioner, however, does not look for a single precise definition before working with children, and helping them play. As a matter of fact, it may very well be that it is just this looseness of definition that allows a wide range of early childhood educators to accept the centrality of these concepts to the field. These words do not in fact represent clearly defined concepts that are tied together in a neat, testable theory, but rather they serve as slogans, as rallying points for practitioners who use them to identify with particular ideological positions in relation to what is important in the experiences we provide for young children.

Just as I was not able to find a unifying theme in the kinds of services and the clients we have in the field of early childhood education; just as I was not able to find a unifying theme in the purposes for which we establish early childhood programs; so I could not find a unifying theme in the ideas that underlie the field of early childhood education unless I was willing to limit my search to the ideas being proposed a century back. I am forced, it seems, to accept the fact that early childhood education is not one thing. It consists of many kinds of services, presented to many types of clients, by a diverse group of practitioners, through agencies under varied sponsorships, aimed at achieving a broad range of purposes.

If this statement is accepted, then can there be a unifying force, whether a set of ideas or ideals, that underlies the field and its practices? What kinds of conclusions can we arrive at? What kinds of guidance can we provide those who study our field? Given the diversity of the field, as I found it, I could not come up with one single conclusion. Therefore, I would like to present three endings to this presentation.

The first is based on a fable, "The Blind Men and The Elephant." The story, as it has been told and retold, concerns a group of blind men who come upon an elephant. No one of them could see the entire animal, so by touching its separate part, each concluded what it was: "A snake," thought the one who touched its tail. "A wall," thought the one who touched his side. "A tree trunk," thought the one who touched its leg. And so one. Each individual experienced only a part of the whole yet each thought his part was the whole.

As early childhood educators, we each operate in only one of a vast, diverse field. Our inquiries tend to be limited. There is a danger that we will overgeneralize from what we know, that we will think of what we experience and come to understand as the totality of the field, and that will see simple interactions of the variable that we may study as basic explanations of major effects. Each generalization of this type would be a distortion of reality. Yet each inquiry, each study, each insight can contribute to our understanding of the whole, if placed in its proper perspective, and combined with insights and understandings derived by others.

The second ending is also based on a fable. It was used in the Introduction to the Report of the Committee of Nineteen on the Theory and Practice of the Kindergarten: (Laws, 1913)

> A father had three sons whom he loved equally well. This father owned a precious ring - said to be endowed with power to bring highest blessings to its owner. Each one of the sons asked the father to bestow the Ring on him after the father's death. The father, in his great love for his sons, promised the Ring to each one. In his old age, the father sent for a jeweler and asked him to make two rings exactly like the precious Ring owned by him. The jeweler assented, and after a while he brought the three rings to the father, who could not distinguish the precious Ring from the other two, so well were they made. When the time came that the father died, he called each of his sons separately to him, blessed him, and gave him a ring. After the father's burial, the three brothers met, and each one claimed the birthright and the ownership of the genuine right. Finally, when they could not decide which was the original one, they went to a Judge, who gave the decision in the form of advice, viz., 'As the true Ring is said to have the magic power of making the owner beloved and esteemed by God and man, and as each of you three brothers believes his ring to be the genuine or original one, so let each one, untouched by his prejudice, strive to reveal the power of the Ring in his life by loving peaceableness, and by charity and sincere devotion to God; and when in later generations the power of the true Ring reveals itself, I will call upon you again, before the "seat of Judgment." A wiser man than I may be there and speak.' (p. xv)

In the field of early childhood education, we have many theories expounded. We have heard many purposes suggested. We have been told that many roles are the proper ones for our services. The diversity can be confusing, but it is not necessarily bad. While each of us may believe that his position is the right one, and act accordingly, at some later generation we may all be called on to the "seat of Judgment" to finally learn which of us indeed has the true Ring.

My third and final ending derives from research, rather than fable. I had recently come across a study of English infant school classrooms. All Things Bright and Beautiful? by Ronald King. (1978) King a sociologist did an ethnographic study of early childhood classrooms, theoretically based in the work of the sociologist, Max Weber. King's study was designed to understand the ways in which teachers typify their situations, that is, give meanings to them. King suggests that the reality of the classroom teachers' world is constructed through their ideology. It is the belief system of the teachers which led them to a set of common definitions of their situations, and led them to share a common language and set of concepts. This system was highlighted by the one teacher who was employed in the school who did not share their definitions; he was not "infant trained."

Although I am not convinced that the source of common beliefs lies within professional preparation, I do believe that as a group, early childhood educators hold a common belief system. The shared values and definitions, the concepts and slogans we use help us to define the world of early childhood education in a common way. While there are disagreements within members of the field, there is still something shared that holds us together. My colleagues in other departments at

my university, for example, tell me that they can tell whether a student is specializing in elementary education or early childhood education even though the two specializations are in the same department and no official distinction is made between them.

Perhaps it is this common set of definitions, this common set of beliefs, that unify the field. Despite the fact that we may do different things, work in different settings, serve different purposes, and feel responsible to different agencies, the fact that we define ourselves as unified, that we decide to hold beliefs in common, that ties us to one another and makes us a field of early childhood education. Perhaps in this sense we still accept the idea of Froebel, the importance of unity within diversity.

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